

VZCZCXRO6947
OO RUEHBI
DE RUEHLM #0998/01 1641136
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 131136Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3660
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9715
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 6144
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4179
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9250
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3133
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2210
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3044
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0254
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6695
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4578
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1209

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000998

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/20/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: FOREIGN SECRETARY DISCUSSES OSLO,
POSITIVELY RECEIVES AMBASSADOR'S DEMARCHE ON TERRORISM
WORKING GROUPS

REF: A. COLOMBO 990 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. STATE 94541

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Lunstead. 1.4(b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ambassador met Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary Palihakkara and Peace Secretariat Chief and head of the Oslo delegation Kohona on June 13 in the wake of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) refusal to enter talks with the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) in Oslo on June 8-9 on the status of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). (Ref A) Palihakkara and Kohona stated they believed the LTTE's surprise card at Oslo was meant to assure the Tamil diaspora that the EU ban of May 30 had not deterred the LTTE, and that the LTTE wanted a forum to release their Oslo Communiqué that reaffirmed Tamil rights to self determination and possibly alluded to military action. The Ambassador briefed both on the U.S.'s initiative to engage fifteen countries to stem LTTE financing and weapons procurement, which both GSL officials accepted with genuine thanks and promise of cooperation.

The Tiger Card

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador met with Foreign Secretary Palihakkara on June 13 to discuss the situation after the LTTE scuttling of talks with the GSL in Oslo. Palihakkara said he had opted out of accompanying Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera to Oslo to meet with the Norwegians June 12 in order to wait for Oslo delegation head and Peace Secretariat chief Palitha Kohona's debrief upon the latter's return to Sri Lanka.

[1](#)3. (C) Taking an evenhanded tone, Palihakkara stated that he surmised the LTTE's motives for playing a "surprise card" in Oslo were two fold. First, they wanted to demonstrate to the Tamil diaspora, which in large part funds the terrorist organization either willingly or unwillingly, that the E.U. ban had neither affected their fundraising and recruitment abilities nor their resolve. Second, Palihakkara contended, the LTTE wanted a well-publicized platform from which to

release their clearly premeditated "Oslo Communiqu" of June 9: the document may have presaged LTTE military or other violent action against the GSL.

Gut Feeling

¶4. (C) While Palihakkara admitted the possibility of "nasty" Tiger violence, he said, "My gut feeling is that the LTTE is more posturing than substance. I don't think there will be a major security problem." On the issue of LTTE refusal to accept EU nationals as members of the SLMM, Palihakkara recommended patience. "The LTTE needs the SLMM as much as anyone else." Similarly, Norway is "correctly facing a lot of criticism by trying to accommodate the LTTE" but "Norway must be given some space" to facilitate.

Devolution Think Tank

¶5. (C) Palihakkara noted that President Rajapaksa is taking a proactive approach to the peace process following the failure of the Oslo talks. Three initiatives include: the appointment of a bipartisan committee or "think tank" of Sri Lankan academics to draft a proposal for maximum devolution of power to the North and East; "humanitarian focal points" to deal with displaced persons in the East; and increased political dialog with the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and other Tamil groups. "The TNA," Palihakkara added, "is also in an impossible situation. They are afraid." (Presumably Palihakkara meant that the TNA has little choice

COLOMBO 00000998 002 OF 003

but to toe the LTTE line.)

Demarche Delivered on Sri Lanka Contact Groups

¶6. (C) The Ambassador told Palihakkara that the US is inviting fifteen other governments to form overlapping contact groups to address Tiger financing and weapons procurement. Palihakkara agreed to reinforce Sri Lanka's interest in working with the international community to bring an end to the conflict by reaching out to these nations' foreign offices after the US has made initial proposals, but to "be economical" in discussing the initiative until the USG wishes to make it known.

¶7. (C) Ambassador impressed upon Palihakkara the importance and uniqueness of this initiative, since the LTTE does not pose a world-wide threat or a terrorist threat to the US. As the move represents a big step outside of the vital national interests of the US, the GSL must do everything in its power, the Ambassador stressed, to make sure that the GSL's human rights record is clean. Palihakkara said he understood and would use the Ambassador's message to influence others in the GSL.

¶8. (C) Palihakkara was visibly pleased with the US's contact group initiative, saying "We value your commitment to do peacemaking in a practical way." The Ambassador stressed the need not to announce or leak this initiative, and Palihakkara said he would keep the news in close-hold.

Peace Secretariat Surprised

¶9. (C) Ambassador also met June 13 with Palitha Kohona, head of the GSL Peace Secretariat, and also head of the negotiating team which went to Oslo. Palitha said that the LTTE refusal to meet was a complete surprise. The GSL team had been waiting in the negotiating room at 9 a.m. on June 8,

when they were told by the Norwegians that the LTTE was refusing to join them. The GSL team stayed around until 7:30 that evening while the Norwegians worked on the Tigers to participate. In the interim Palitha had consulted with President Rajapakse, and when Eric Solheim came to see them at 7:00 that evening, he told Solheim they were going home. Solheim was furious at the LTTE, Palitha said.

¶10. (C) Palitha said there was no doubt in his mind that the entire drama had been cooked up by the LTTE beforehand. He surmised that they wanted to show the Tamil diaspora that the EU listing did not prevent them from traveling and meeting. He agreed that the Tigers' seven-page "Oslo Communiqu" had not been written on the spot but prepared beforehand. It was the work, he said, of New York-based lawyer Rudrakumaran and Australian resident (and former Attorney General of Sri Lanka) Pashupati Siva.

11 (C) Palitha said that he had spoken on the phone that morning to Norwegian Special Envoy Jon Hanssen-Bauer, and that Hanssen-Bauer, despite the setback, was still optimistic. The Government, Palitha said, would reply soon to Solheim's five questions, and the answers would all be affirmative. The Government, he said, would not renege on previous agreements. President Rajapaksa, he said, had no intention of going to war. Unfortunately, LTTE behavior at Oslo would strengthen the hand of hard-liners in the Government.

¶12. (C) Ambassador told Palitha that the US had now started the initiative to form two international groups to work on the issue of Tiger financing and weapons procurement. As he had done with Foreign Secretary earlier, Ambassador said that the US was undertaking a significant effort here, and that it

COLOMBO 00000998 003 OF 003

was crucial that the Government work to ensure a clean human rights record. Palitha said that he understood, and that US emphasis on this point would help him and his like-minded colleagues, in debates within the Government. Ambassador asked that Palitha not spread the word of this initiative yet. Palitha also said that he agreed with US and other Co-Chairs that the Government had to come up with something to offer to Tamils to show they had an alternative to armed struggle. In this regard, he thought the announcement the day before of a bi-partisan experts committee to come up with recommendations on a final settlement was a positive step. The Ranil Wickremasinghe government had some good ideas, but tried to impose them without building consensus--which had led to Ranil's downfall. President Rajapaksa, by contrast, was a careful consensus builder. Progress might be slower under Rajapaksa, he said, but it would be more likely to last.

Comment

¶13. (C) Comment. Not surprisingly, both Palihakkara and Kohona picked up quickly on the importance of the Ref B working group initiative, and that it will give the GSL, if it is inclined, "grace" to put forward a concrete, substantive plan for a permanent solution. End comment.
LUNSTEAD